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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001062

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/W, INR/AA
DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ENRG](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: YAR'ADUA DOES "MEDIA CHAT"

REF: A. ABUJA 962 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)B. ABUJA 710 AND PREVIOUS
[1](#)C. ABUJA 643
[1](#)D. 07 ABUJA 1931

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Heather Merritt for reasons 1
.4. (b & d).

[1](#)1. (U) SUMMARY. On May 29, President Yar'Adua conducted a live television "media chat" to mark the one year anniversary of his administration as well as to celebrate Nigeria's Democracy Day (a national holiday commemorating the country's return to democracy on May 29, 1999 after 16 years of military rule.) During the press roundtable, Yar'Adua spoke frankly about his health, his views on former President Obasanjo's tenure, and the power sector. The President also intimated that personnel and structural changes would likely take place within his administration fairly soon. In what appears to be his attempt to publicly respond, through the media, to the growing impatience from the public about his slow pace of deliverables, Yar'Adua promised citizens "exciting times" ahead, including electoral reform and a legacy of respect for the rule of law. END SUMMARY

YAR'ADUA'S HEALTH

[1](#)2. (U) In a press conference televised live on May 29, President Yar'Adua expressed surprise at the rampant rumors that followed his April 2008 trip to Germany for medical attention (ref B). He explained that his Special Advisor on Communication, Olusegun Adeniyi, issued a statement prior to his departure detailing his ailment, but the public failed to believe it. Yar'Adua explained that he suffered from malaria for four days and his physicians attempted to treat it using a drug called "Metakelfin." (Note: According to information available on the internet, "Metakelfin" is a one-dose anti-malarial treatment manufactured by a company called "Pharmacia." It is supposed to work within three days. End Note.) However, his symptoms continued, the President said, so he was attended to by a new doctor who administered a second (unnamed) medication to which he experienced an allergic reaction. The allergy was apparently severe enough to make his face swell up, prompting him to depart for Germany. During the telecast, Yar'Adua also admitted to having kidney problems, but did not elaborate on the exact nature of those problems.

FORMER PRESIDENT OBASANJO

13. (U) Responding to questions about the on-going National Assembly investigations of various activities under the administration of former President Obasanjo, President Yar'Adua defended his predecessor, stating that President Obasanjo "did his best, whether people like it or not." Yar'Adua did, however, support the National Assembly's power to hold hearings on Obasanjo's past policies and said that he is waiting for the outcome and their full report. The president said the details of the report will determine the next line of action. Contrary to his public interview, President Yar'Adua told the Ambassador in April that he was working hard to dismantle some of Obasanjo's policies and contracts, as in his view, they fell outside of due process and rule of law (ref C).

POWER SECTOR CRISIS

14. (U) In response to questions about Nigeria's power supply, President Yar'Adua explained that declaring a state of emergency in the power sector would require a great deal of planning and consultation before it could be implemented. "We need to have a national plan that includes emergency legislation for the sector," the President stated, so that in the end, Nigeria would be able to provide sufficient power to the entire country. The President predicted that Nigeria will generate 6,000 megawatts of electricity by the end of 2009 and that it would only be possible for the GON to reach its goal of generating 10,000 megawatts by 2011. Yar'Adua added, however, that "people also have to change the way they think about the sector, including their responsibility in paying their bills."

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CABINET RESHUFFLE

15. (C) During the press forum, Yar'Adua mentioned there is a strong possibility that a cabinet "shake-up" is imminent. However, during a May 29 meeting with the Ambassador, Foreign Minister Ojo Maduekwe, said that President Yar'Adua is not planning a large-scale cabinet reshuffle, but will instead make strategic moves/replacements of a handful of ministers in the coming months. The Foreign Minister added that the President's goal was to have more of his own people around him who were not reporting his every movement to former President Obasanjo. (Note: Since the Yar'Adua interview, he has removed two former Obasanjo loyalists from his immediate personal staff (septel). End Note.)

LOOKING AHEAD

16. (U) Although a newly released poll showed Yar'Adua's approval rating at 48%, a drop from the 70-plus percent reported at his administration's 100 day mark (ref D), the President promised that "exciting times await Nigerians." He described his perceived slow pace of reform as "a process of learning," and added that one of Nigeria's greatest problems was the lack of respect for the rule of law and lack of proper planning. He urged the citizens to be patient, as it takes time to develop "good plans that will translate to actual achievements." Confident that the Electoral Reform Committee will complete its assignment by the end of this year and develop comprehensive electoral reforms, Yar'Adua stated his determination to leave a legacy of a credible electoral process and rule of law.

GETTING THE MESSAGE?

17. (C) COMMENT: Though in the past he has not done live media interviews, President Yar'Adua's recent round of media interviews (with both domestic and international press) seems to demonstrate his understanding that Nigerians are losing patience with his slow pace of reforms and deliverables. It appears the President may be getting the message that he must begin to show results if he is to maintain the support and goodwill of the public. Addressing his perceived "slowness"

and making more promises during recent interviews, might have bought him some additional time; but he must quickly start delivering to the Nigerian people some tangible improvements that affect their everyday lives before his support base (both elite and public) begins to erode permanently. END
COMMENT.
SANDERS